

On Thursday, we marked the seventh anniversary of the terrorist attacks on September 11th. I was honored to attend the memorial service at the Pentagon, as well as the dedication of the 9/11 memorial there.

The Pentagon memorial is a beautiful park, featuring 184 light benches that commemorate the 184 individuals who lost their lives in the attack. Even more impressive has been the tenacity of the families involved in spearheading the project. Against unlikely odds, they sought funding and drove the multimillion dollar project on their own. Their dedication is a testament to the will of Americans to never forget the significance of September 11th.

The attacks of 9/11 tested our will and steeled the resolve of a nation caught by surprise. It's fair to say that decades of relative peace had eased us into a sense of complacency. However, in the ruins of the World Trade Center, the rubble of the Pentagon and a scorched field in Pennsylvania, we renewed our obligation to protect and defend freedom from its enemies.

Each generation of Americans has been called to a similar duty and the challenge of our generation is clear: We must protect our homeland from attack, pursue the enemies of freedom abroad and never forget the lessons and sacrifices of 9/11. With each passing year, time eases our sorrow and life inches towards normal. As the President said on Thursday, eventually, there will be no Americans who remember the attacks of September 11, 2001. However, if America is to remain a beacon of liberty throughout the world, we must be vigilant and unwavering in our defense of freedom.

Thankfully, there is no shortage of Americans willing to answer the call of duty. We are blessed with a military of volunteers that stands ready to take the fight to the enemy. Over 1.7 million men and women have fought in support of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. What's more, each branch of the military met or exceeded its recruiting goals for the month of August and for 2008 to date.

At the local level, we are increasingly vigilant as well. The Department of Homeland Security and FBI, in partnership with federal, state, and local authorities, have created a national network of 66 centers in 48 states to facilitate information sharing on terrorist threats and operational planning. Additionally, millions of Police, Fire, EMS and First Responders have consistently improved their coordination and efforts in the last seven years.

It is an unfortunate certainty that terrorists have sought and will continue to seek to strike again within our borders. It is a testament to our efforts that, since September 11, the terrorists have not been successful. Each generation of Americans has answered the call to defend freedom, and I believe that this generation will continue to proudly answer that call.